

means to be an American. They are worthwhile, honorable goals that have always been a priority of this Senator.

The Higher Education Act, enacted in 1965 to provide disadvantaged students with greater educational opportunities, recognized the shared benefit of providing every American a chance to maximize his or her potential. As a result of the passage of this legislation, doors have been opened to millions of citizens who otherwise would not have had the access or the resources to obtain a higher education. Although the act has been amended over the years through the reauthorization process, the central purposes of the legislation has remained the same—to ensure access, choice and opportunity in higher education.

In light of the tremendous success of this legislation, I am disturbed by the draconian budget cuts being advanced by the current congressional leadership which would effectively undermine the directives of the Higher Education Act. It is particularly distressing when you realize that those who are now seeking to draw back from the American commitment to education through the cuts included in budget reconciliation are, at the same time, propounding the necessity for America to compete more successfully in the world's economy. In my view, they are asserting a basic contradiction. Our success as a competitor in the world's economy rests upon educating our future generations.

Republican budget proposals would dramatically decrease educational opportunity in order to finance tax cuts for the wealthy and to meet arbitrary deficit reduction targets. In my view, Republican budget proposals clearly renege on our historical commitment to improving access to higher education by placing an undue burden on students and their families over the next 7 years. It makes little sense to cut investments in programs which give people the skills to function in a modern, complex society. It makes even less sense to do so in a document which is repeatedly purported to be a budget for our Nation's future.

As you know, the Senate was successful in eliminating several of the more onerous provisions in the education portion of the budget reconciliation—including the .85 percent tax on colleges and universities on their Federal student loan volume, the 6-month post graduation interest-free grace period on student loans, and the interest increase on PLUS loans. However, I remain concerned about what will be contained in the final package.

I also regret that efforts to retain current law with respect to the Federal direct lending program were unsuccessful. The Republican budget plan severely curtails the Federal direct lending program by placing a 20 percent cap on loan volumes. The Department of Education estimates that by the close of the current academic year, direct lending will represent between 35-40 percent of this year's student loan vol-

ume. Should this provision become law, nearly half of the students involved in the direct loan program will have their financial aid disrupted, subjecting them to additional conversion fees and the tremendous anxiety involved in having your financial aid in question.

I have heard from students and educators from across Maryland who have expressed their deep concern about proposed modifications to the direct lending program. One of the first campuses to offer direct lending to its students is in my hometown of Salisbury. The president of Salisbury State University, as well as the chancellor of the University of Maryland System—which enrolls more than 130,000 students, strongly support the direct lending program as beneficial to both students and university administrators.

Mr. President, education in this country has always provided an essential ladder of opportunity for our people and the Higher Education Act has been and continues to be a critical rung in this ladder. In a nation which believes that a person's merit and talent should take them as far as they can go, we must continue to foster a path which allows them to maximize this potential. Many of us here today have benefited from this philosophy and have achieved certain levels of success as a direct result of the opportunities afforded by such principles. It is ironic, at best, that many of those who have utilized these opportunities to advance themselves are now trying to severely limit them for others through draconian budget measures.

As we commemorate the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 1965, it is important to understand that the value of programs authorized by this bill cannot be measured simply in terms of dollars spent. Without Federal support, millions of Americans would not have been able to attend college or receive the advanced training required to make them contributing, productive members of society. If this Nation is to continue to thrive in an ever-evolving global economy, we must not underestimate the value of the Federal Government's commitment to higher education. The celebration of the passage of this bill affords us the opportunity to reaffirm the Federal role in making certain that education remains a top national priority.

THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT

Mr. PELL. Mr. President, 30 years ago today, president Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Higher Education Act. We should not let this anniversary pass without recognizing the profound effect this act has had in opening the doors of higher education for millions of deserving Americans who otherwise would have found a college education beyond their financial reach.

I have said many times that education is a capital investment. No

piece of Federal legislation is more compelling evidence of the benefit of that investment than is the Higher Education Act. Every study we know demonstrates that an individual's climb up the economic ladder is directly related to the amount of education he or she receives. Without question, the opportunities provided because of the higher Education Act and its reauthorizations over the past 30 years demonstrate not only the importance of this investment but also the gains we have made because of this act.

It is through the Higher Education Act that vital programs such as guaranteed student loans, aid to developing colleges, and educational opportunity grants have developed into the critical initiatives that they are today. It was within the context of this legislation that we developed the Pell grant program, which combined with the guaranteed loan program, has become far and away the largest source of aid for low- and middle-income students. Today, Federal student aid constitutes more than 75 percent of all aid available to students to pay for a college education.

Over the years, it is unquestionable that without Federal student aid, literally millions of American students would have been unable to attain a college degree and to pursue productive, meaningful careers that otherwise would have been beyond their reach.

I am honored to have been here when this act began, and to have strongly supported its establishment. Through my work on the Education Subcommittee, I am honored to have played a part in refining it over the years. And I am especially honored to be here today to acknowledge its very significant achievements.

THE BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, on that evening in 1972 when I first was elected to the Senate, I made a commitment to myself that I would never fail to see a young person, or a group of young people, who wanted to see me.

It has proved enormously beneficial to me because I have been inspired by the estimated 60,000 young people with whom I have visited during the nearly 23 years I have been in the Senate.

Most of them have been concerned that the total Federal debt which is about \$15 billion shy of \$5 trillion—which will be exceeded this year. Of course, Congress is responsible for creating this monstrosity for which the coming generations will have to pay.

The young people and I almost always discuss the fact that under the U.S. Constitution, no President can spend a dime of Federal money that has not first been authorized and appropriated by both the House and Senate of the United States.